

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please AMEND claims 9 and 11, as follows. For the Examiner's convenience, all claims currently presented are reproduced below.

1-8. (Canceled)

9. (Currently Amended) A near-field exposure method comprising:

preparing a photomask for near-field exposure, having a light blocking film provided on a base material constituting a membrane portion and a support member supporting the base material, wherein a first alignment mark for rough alignment is provided on the support member and a second alignment mark for fine alignment is provided on the membrane portion;

setting the photomask and an object to be exposed in a near-field exposure apparatus;

aligning the photomask and the object using the first alignment mark;

flexing the membrane portion to contact with the object and detecting a positional relation between the membrane portion and the object using the second alignment mark;

~~aligning the photomask and the object based on the detected positional relation~~
and ~~repeating the flexing step to recognize that a deviation from a correct position of the~~
~~membrane portion corresponding to contact with the object is in an acceptable range;~~ and

exposing the object to light from a light source by way of the photomask.

10. (Previously Presented) A near field exposure method according to claim 9, wherein, when a deviation with reference to a position to be exposed is detected in the position detection,

the flexure of the membrane portion is removed, and the exposure mask and the object to be exposed are relatively moved so as to remove the positional deviation, and subsequently, the membrane portion is flexed again to be contacted to the object to be exposed and, in that state, the position detection is carried out, and wherein this procedure is repeated once or more until the deviation comes into a predetermined tolerable range for exposure precision, whereby the alignment is carried out.

11. (Currently Amended) A near-field exposure method according to claim 9, wherein the second alignment mark is formed at one of (i) adjacent to a center of the ~~membrane~~ membrane and (ii) around the membrane.